Showdown Starts In JFK Probe

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NEW ORLEANS, La. (AP) — A heavy guard was ordered today for the legal showdown in Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's controversial Kennedy assassination probe.

Twenty sheriff's deputies were assigned to watch over the small Criminal District courtroom while state and defense lawyers argue whether retired executive Clay L. Shaw should go to trial.

Garrison accused Shaw, 54, former managing director of the International Trade Mart here, of conspiring with Lee Harvey Oswald and others to kill President John F. Kennedy.

The Warren Commission report named Oswald, a former New Orleans resident, as the killer — and said there was no credible evidence that a conspiracy was involved.

The president was killed in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963. Whether there is enough evidence to warrant formal charge and trial for Shaw was the only matter before the preliminary hearing. Shaw called Garrison's accusations "fantastic."

Under Louisiana law, Shaw was booked — but not formally charged — with conspiracy to murder the president. He was freed on $10,000 bond.

The preliminary hearing was then called by Garrison, a rare move in Louisiana legal procedure. An equally rare three-judge panel was set up to preside.

The district attorney has kept his case secret. But U.S. Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark, in Washington, said he knows what it involves and does not consider the case valid.

Clark said Shaw, during the exhaustive investigation which followed the assassination, was checked out by the FBI and cleared. He declined to say why Shaw was investigated.

Shaw's three defense lawyers first accepted the preliminary hearing. Then they switched tactics and fought it vigorously, losing at every step.

The three-judge panel overruled a defense motion Monday to have a single judge preside over the hearing — rejecting the argument that the panel was tantamount to being tried by a jury, and that it was unprecedented in law and unauthorized.

After disposing of defense motions, the panel rescinded a widely ignored rule which it had imposed on press coverage last week forbidding the reporting of anything except what occurred in open court.

Garrison contends that Shaw, Oswald, David W. Ferrie and others met in Ferrie's apartment here in September 1963, and plotted "how they would kill John F. Kennedy." Garrison said a confidential informant was present at the meeting. The informant's story, he added, stood up under questioning while the subject was under the influence of sodium pentothal — or "truth serum."

When Shaw's lawyers, at a hearing last week, demanded that the unnamed informant be produced, Judge Bernard Bagert said he would have to rule on that at the preliminary hearing.

He directed that the district attorney have the informant ready to face the accused.

Shaw is the only man named by Garrison as attending the meeting who still lives. Ferrie, 49, an airline pilot fired in 1961 due to arrests on morals charges, died in his apartment Feb. 22 while under investigation.

He had called the investigation a "big joke," scoffing: "They got me pegged as the getaway pilot."

His death was listed as due to natural causes — a massive cerebral hemorrhage caused when high blood pressure broke a weak brain artery.

The district attorney's staff Monday questioned Raymon Cummings, a former Dallas taxi driver who claims he once drove Oswald and Ferrie to Jack Ruby's night club in 1963. To the day of of his death, Jan. 3, Ruby contended he never knew Oswald.

Cummings, accompanied by his lawyer, flew here from Dallas.